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# **TWO HOUSES BY BRUCE GOFF**

**CHARLES TURZAK RESIDENCE**

**7059 North Olcott Avenue**

**Chicago, Illinois**

**and**

**MYRON BACHMAN RESIDENCE REMODELING**

**1244 West Carmen Avenue**

**Chicago, Illinois**

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December, 1991**

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# **TWO HOUSES BY BRUCE GOFF**

## **CHARLES TURZAK RESIDENCE**

**7059 North Olcott Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois**

**Erected: 1938-39**

## **MYRON BACHMAN RESIDENCE REMODELING**

**1244 West Carmen Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois**

**Erected: 1947-48**

Of any American architect, the work of Bruce Goff is probably the most difficult to classify in terms of conventional style and physical description. Not only is it difficult to relate Goff's work to that of other architects or movements, it is equally difficult to relate his individual projects to one another. Each design embodies a personal redefinition of the practice of architecture, responding to the tangible and intangible needs of the individual client by breaking free of traditional boundaries of form, space, and technology.

Guided by ideals advanced by Louis H. Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright and other practitioners of creative architectural movements in the United States and Europe, Bruce Goff evolved an approach to architecture that was uniquely his own. A keenly perceptive individual, Goff was able to create buildings that addressed the basic functional requirements of each client, and the subtleties inherent in their individual personalities and lifestyles. Each intimately tailored design was developed from Goff's spontaneous imagination and sharpened instinctual grasp of architectural principles. Conventional design precepts were extended to new dimensions or discarded altogether to create compositions ideally suited to each project. Goff's works were the result of harmonious creative evolution, representing one of the most sensitive realizations of the creation of an organic, indigenous architecture.

Bruce Goff's work can best be understood through his residential commissions, which comprised the majority of his executed work. Chicago is fortunate to have two excellent examples of Goff's residential designs, both of which exemplify the diversity of his creative genius. The Charles Turzak House on the far Northwest Side of Chicago is a deceptively simple design created in 1938-39 as the home and studio for a well-known Chicago artist. At first glance it seems compatible with the modest bungalows of the area, but closer examination reveals the Turzak design as one of uncommon creativity and flexibility.

Similarly revealing is the extensive remodeling of an existing frame house in Uptown which was executed for the family of recording engineer Myron Bachman in 1947-48. Adapting a technology from World War II quonset huts, the ca. 1890 house was clad with an abstract skin of corrugated aluminum, and altered to accommodate a small recording studio and the residential needs of the Bachman family. The Bachman remodeling demonstrated a decidedly unconventional solution to the re-use of an existing building, and continues to attract the same degree of neighborhood interest and curiosity that it generated when executed over forty years ago.

### ***Bruce Goff: An Unconventional Genius***

Bruce Alonzo Goff spent almost his entire life in architecture. Goff was born in Alton, Kansas in 1904, into a family that spent the first decade of the century residing in various small towns in the Middle West, eventually settling in the prospering oil boom town of Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1915. Noting his young son's ability for sketching imaginary buildings, Goff's father took him to the local architectural firm of Rush, Endacott & Rush in 1916, where at the age of twelve he was given an apprenticeship. The partners in the firm recognized the young Goff's instinctual talent and encouraged his professional development. Initially instructed to trace the Greek orders, Goff was asked one day to "make up" a design for a house. The resulting design bore a striking resemblance to those of Frank Lloyd Wright, whose name and work was unknown to Goff. Upon being shown articles and illustrations of Wright's work, Goff was inspired to study further, looking not only into Wright's work, but that of Louis Sullivan and other architects associated with the creative architectural movements of the early twentieth century.

Perceptively, Goff looked beyond the outward stylistic aspects of these movements, and studied the philosophies inherent in their creation. The concept of creating an "organic architecture" as suggested by the writings and work of Sullivan and Wright was particularly enlightening, emphasizing the creative role of the individual within the context of nature, and the evolution of architectural works as a personal abstraction of the tangible and intangible aspects of each project. Goff's artistic philosophies were also shaped by his early interest in music and modern art movements, learned in large part from his avid perusal of popular magazines and books. Being largely self taught, Goff was freed of the regimentation of formal architectural training, and was able to successfully synthesize a diverse range of interests and artistic disciplines into his approach to architecture.

Goff's first executed design was for a summer house in Los Angeles, California, erected in 1919 when he was fifteen. Upon graduating from Tulsa High School in 1922 he was given a full time position at Rush, Endacott & Rush, and entrusted with increasing design responsibility. Recognizing Goff's creative abilities, the firm put him in charge of several major projects throughout the 1920s, the most notable being the 1926 commission for the Boston Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church in Tulsa. While its prominent tower and strong vertical emphasis suggested traditional ecclesiastical design, the overall design reflected fresh

new forms attracting much favorable publicity for its twenty-two-year-old designer. Goff was given a partnership in the reorganized firm of Rush, Endacott & Goff in 1929, an association which he maintained until 1932, when the negative business impact of the depression forced him to look for new opportunities.

After a brief attempt at independent architectural practice in Tulsa, Goff moved to Chicago in 1934 at the invitation of sculptor Alphonso Iannelli. Headquartered in Park Ridge, Illinois, Iannelli operated a multi-discipline commercial studio, working in the areas of painting, sculpture, interior design, industrial design and architecture. Goff was brought in to assist with the architectural aspects of Iannelli's studio, but was disappointed to find that he did not have the same degree of control of his projects that he had previously enjoyed in Tulsa. Hired as chief designer for the Vitrolite division of the Libby-Owings-Corning glass company in 1936, Goff was responsible for designing installations for the firm's line of colored glass architectural facing material, and designed its now-demolished showroom in the Merchandise Mart.

In 1937, Goff established himself in full-time independent architectural practice in Chicago, renting a small office at 1515 W. Howard Street. Working and living out of the small one-room office, Goff began to receive residential commissions as the effects of the depression began to clear. Among his first projects was a house for artist Charles Turzak on the far Northwest Side of Chicago, as well as projects in suburban Park Ridge and Northfield.

With the United States entry into World War II, Goff joined the Navy in August 1942, and was subsequently assigned to the Naval Construction Battalion in the Aleutians. Reassigned to Camp Parks near San Francisco in late 1943, Goff was responsible for the design and construction of the chapel, officer's club, and other projects at the camp. With a limited budget and a lack of materials due to wartime shortages, Goff's Camp Parks projects showed great imagination and ingenuity, using war surplus and commonplace "found" materials in new and creative ways. Goff's exposure to the materials and technologies of wartime America were to have a far-reaching effect on his subsequent architectural works. The inexpensive, lightweight system of Quonset hut construction for military buildings was particularly influential, and was re-worked and adapted in infinite variety for many of his later projects.

After being released from the military in December 1945, Goff briefly maintained an architectural practice in Berkeley, California, and one year later relocated to Norman, Oklahoma, where he divided his time between his practice and a teaching position with the School of Architecture at the University of Oklahoma. The unconventional outward character of his architectural works increasingly attracted attention in the popular press, and gained nationwide publicity through the publication of projects in major magazines like *Life* and *Coronet*. The construction of a Goff house in a neighborhood became something of an event, attracting throngs of curious crowds who often blocked the streets and lined up for blocks when given the opportunity to view the interiors. The unconventional nature of Goff's buildings were often a source of consternation to neighbors, but his clients typically expressed satisfaction with the custom-crafted qualities of their houses.

Resigning his chairmanship of the Architecture Department at the University of Oklahoma in December, 1955, Goff moved his practice to Bartlesville, Oklahoma, early the following year, remaining there until 1964. Between 1964 and 1970, Goff lived and worked in Kansas

City, Missouri, and from 1970 until his death in 1982, maintained his practice in Tyler, Texas. During this period, Goff also went on extended lecture tours of Europe, Australia, and Japan, where his work and architectural viewpoints were enthusiastically received.

### *The Turzak House*

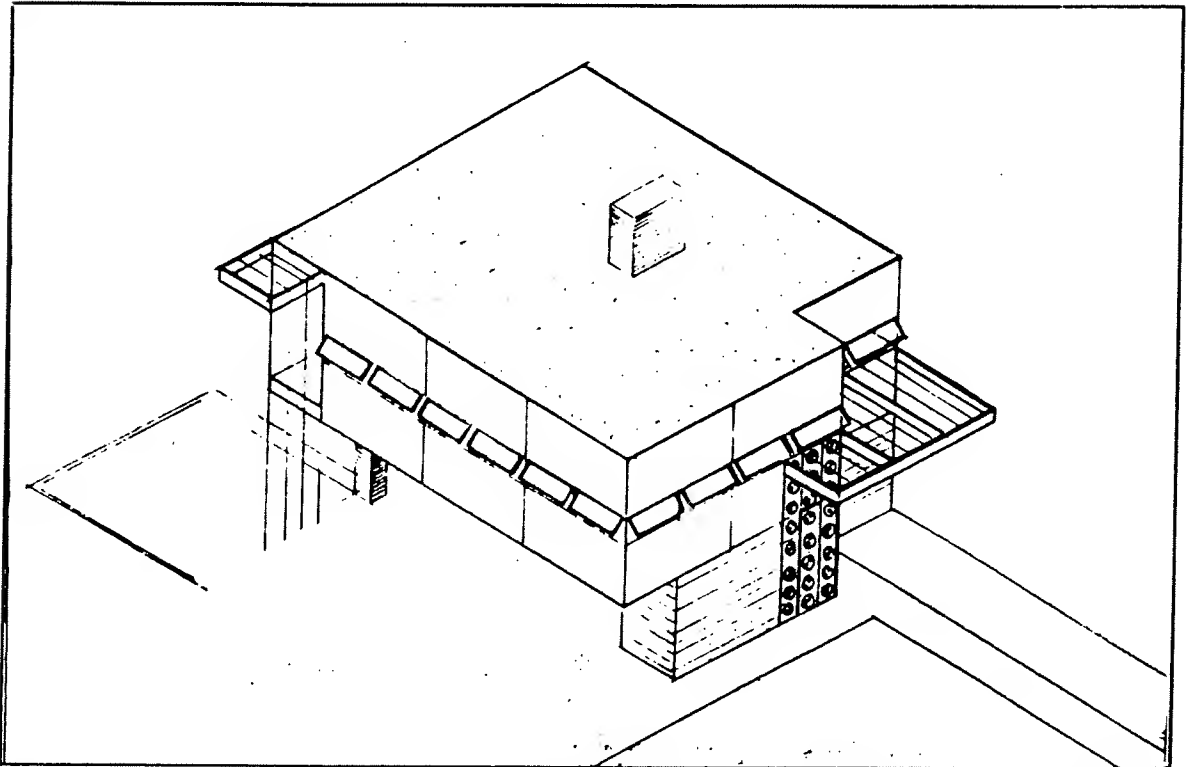
Among Goff's earliest Chicago commissions was a two-story home and studio for the family of Charles Turzak, a well-respected Chicago artist. Turzak was born in Streeter, Illinois, in 1899, the son of Czechoslovakian immigrant parents. After attending the School of the Art Institute from 1920 to 1923, Turzak established himself as a free-lance artist in Chicago, and 1929 supplemented his education by taking an extended tour of France, Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. Although possessing ability as a painter, Turzak received the greatest recognition for his wood-block prints depicting historical tableaux and Chicago street scenes. For income, Turzak prepared limited edition folios of his wood-block prints, which were offered to sale to the general public. One of his best-known works was his "Abraham Lincoln - Biography of Woodcuts," a folio which was offered for sale at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. Turzak was also involved with the Federal Art Project, and created a series of murals for the main Chicago Post-Office which have since been lost, and a still-extant mural of canal boats in the post office at Lemont, Illinois.

Charles Turzak inspecting the construction of his home. Prior to installation of the carport trellis, the massing of the exterior masonry was clearly evident. *(Courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago)*



The circumstances of how the Turzak family came to select Goff as their architect is unknown, but it is likely that they knew each other through mutual involvement in various art-related institutions and functions in the city. On August 27, 1938, Charles and Florence Turzak purchased a 50 x 147 foot lot on the corner of Estes and Olcott, and less than two months later applied for a building permit to build their \$6,500 Goff-designed residence.

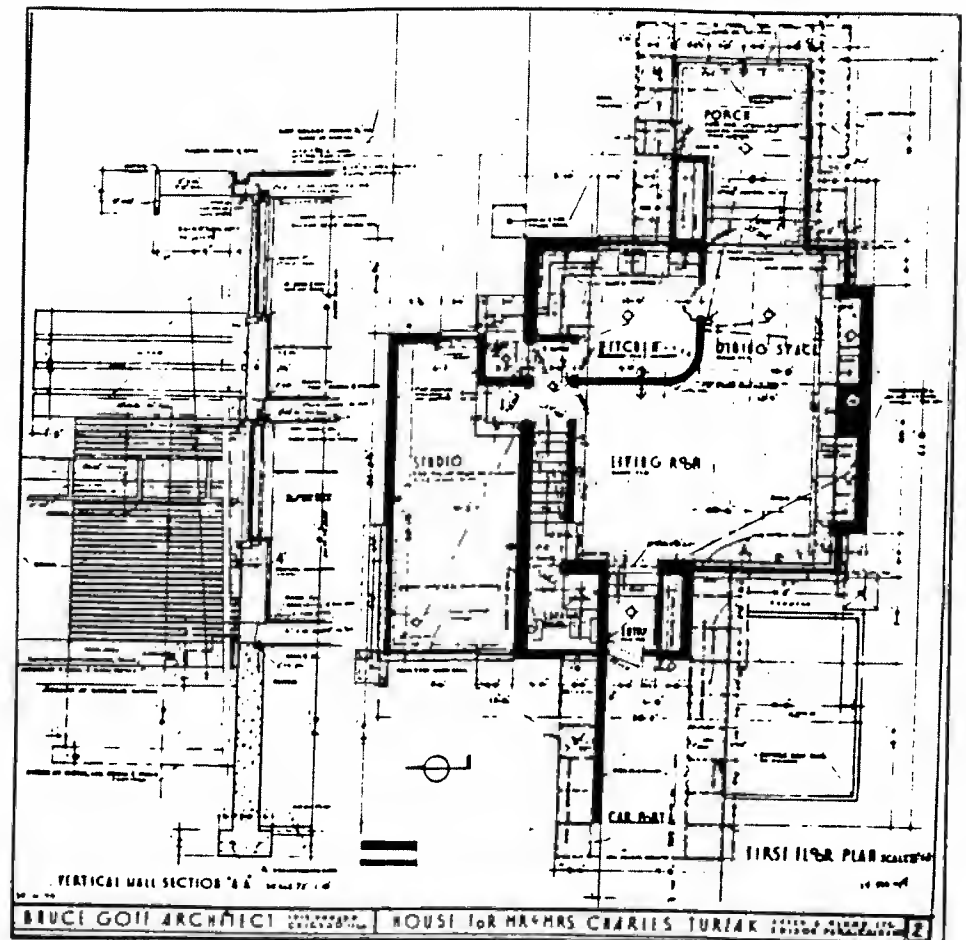
Unlike many Goff designs which stand out in their surroundings, the Turzak House gives the initial impression of being in character with the other houses of the neighborhood. This compatibility may be in part due to a request by the client or financial constraints, as initial sketches for the house show a much more abstract design, with a brick first story which is partially set back from a smooth-faced second story, fenestrated with a ribbon of horizontal hopper windows. A sketch section drawing also suggests that the interior of this preliminary design was to be divided into four staggered mezzanine levels, a solution which Goff continued to experiment with in his later works.



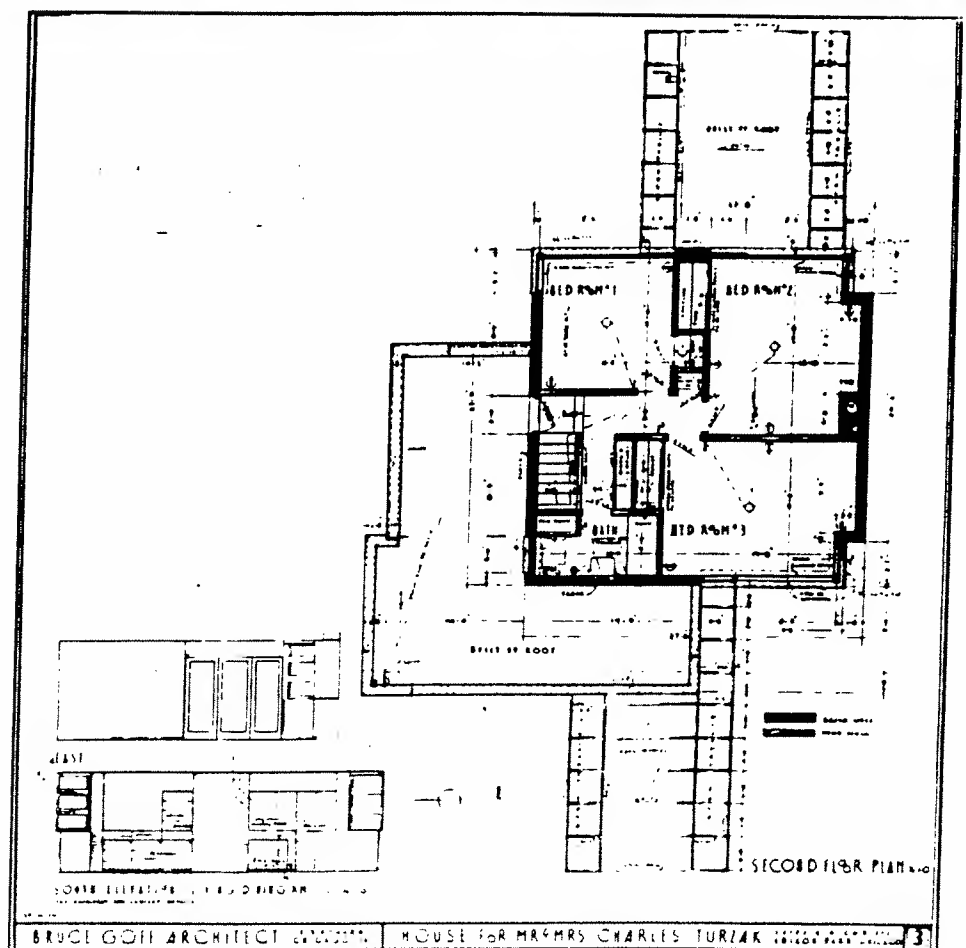
Preliminary studies for the Turzak House indicate a much more radical solution than the executed design. *(Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago)*

The executed design was much less radical in plan and elevation than the preliminary study, yet still is at great variance with the typical house of the period. The overall effect of the house is one of abstract horizontal asymmetry, with changes in the plane and volume of the exterior masonry modulated by transitional wood balconies and overhangs. For the exterior masonry, Goff chose to use inexpensive Chicago common brick with its subtle shadings of

The square first-floor plan of the Turzak House is expanded to the left to accommodate Charles Turzak's studio. (Courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago)



The square plan of the second floor is fully evident as it rises above the roofs of the first-floor extensions. (Courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago)





The entry to the Turzak House was placed off the street behind the trellised carport. The latticed trellis of the carport, as well as the detail of the cornice, created changing shadow patterns across the face of the building and the ground. *(Courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago)*

pinkish buff. Horizontal mortar joints were slightly raked, emphasizing the horizontality of the overall composition. The stepped volume of the first story reflects the placement of Turzak's studio at the outside corner, allowing his workspace to receive maximum natural light. The entrance was placed away from the public view, located behind a trellised open carport defined by the extension of a brick wall toward the street. The prominent location of the carport and its relation to the front door clearly affirmed the importance of the automobile in the daily life of the period.

The heaviness of the masonry walls are diminished by breaking up the corners with bands of horizontal windows, made possible by the insertion of steel lally columns at the corners to carry the structural load. Large fixed sash "picture windows" are flanked by operable sash consisting of two-light casements at the bottom, above which is a matching hopper window which could be opened for natural ventilation in inclement weather.

The living quarters were planned within a square central core, which becomes fully visible on the exterior at the second floor level. On the first floor, the living room and dining room are planned as adjoining open space, separated from the kitchen by a curved wall. At the rear was an open one story porch, which was glassed in and converted to a sunroom by Goff in 1939. The second floor has three bedrooms and a bath opening off of a central hall. A second





Above: The Turzak House as it appeared upon completion in 1939. *(Courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago)* Below: The Turzak House has been altered with the addition of a garage at the rear and modification of the exterior wood detailing. *(Photograph by Robert Begolka for the Chicago Historic Resources Survey)*



floor exterior deck with a railing of horizontal boards wraps the corner where the first floor studio and entrance extend beyond the exterior walls of the second floor.

The staggered configuration of the exterior walls, and the varied projections and planes of wood create a lively interplay of light and shadow, and subtly suggest a shifting transition of levels and spaces. An unusual original detail was the projecting cornice, which consisted of applied wood lookouts, creating varied shadow patterns at different times of day.

The house was ready for occupancy by Charles and Florence Turzak and their young daughter by the middle of 1939, and continued to be their family home until it was sold in 1956. Subsequent alterations include the addition of a garage at the rear, the removal of the original wood cornice, the covering of the carport trellis with a solid roof, and modifications to the balcony railing.

### ***The Myron Bachman House Remodeling***

One of Bruce Goff's most unusual commissions came in 1947 when he was engaged to plan the remodeling of an existing frame house for recording engineer Myron Bachman. Unlike commissions for new residences where Goff was relatively unrestrained in evolving his designs, the Bachman project required him to work with an existing nineteenth century frame structure, and execute the remodeling program at a moderate cost. The resulting project reflected Goff's creative resourcefulness in adapting existing conditions through the use of unlikely materials and technologies.

Myron Bachman and his family had lived since 1942 in a modest two-story frame dwelling in the Uptown neighborhood. The house had been built sometime before 1889, the year the village of Lake View was annexed to the city. With its gabled roof, clapboard siding, and enclosed front porch, the Bachman house was typical of the closely-spaced late nineteenth century houses of the immediate area. A commercial recording engineer, Bachman had engaged Goff in 1942 to plan a small recording studio within his house, and after the war commissioned a more extensive remodeling of the property. Early in 1947, drawings were prepared in Goff's Norman, Oklahoma, office to expand the house to create additional living quarters for the Bachman family, a new recording studio, and an extensive reworking of the exterior and interior finishes. Construction was started in 1948, and finished in the same year.

Except for the pitch of the gabled roof, the exterior of the remodeled residence bore little resemblance to its original appearance. Adapting the materials and technology from World War II quonset hut construction, Goff clad the roof and exterior walls with a shimmering skin of corrugated aluminum. The aluminum was applied directly over the existing materials, and detailed to create the maximum visual effect with minimal expense. As an example, the projecting eaves on the gable ends of the original house were covered over with angled pieces of corrugated aluminum which tied into the face of the house, contributing to the prismatic qualities of the facade. The windows were extensively changed, the most dramatic alteration being the replacement of the second-story windows on the south and east elevations with a large diamond-shaped windows with irregularly shaped casement sash. Ventilation for the attic



The Bachman House has been impeccably maintained over the years, retaining all of the features of the Bruce Goff 1947 remodeling. (*Robert Selby, photographer*)

was provided by redwood louvers, extending from the top of the windows to the peak of the roof. Aluminum ridge projections on the gable faces suggest Japanese influences and unifies the varied planes of the facades and roof.

On the first floor, the house was extended to the street and to the east with a masonry addition of pinkish common brick, given texture by the heavy application of extruded mortar. The addition created a new entry to the house and studio, a windowless skylit control room for Bachman's recording facilities, and an expanded living-room which also doubled as the studio itself. A garage with corrugated aluminum doors was also provided on the front facade, a practical necessity since the property had no alley access for a rear garage. Although many of the interior partitions of the original house were left in place, the finish and trim were completely changed. Goff's plans called for sandblasted wood doors and trim, and the interior decoration was carried out in shades of pink and silver, reflecting the materials of the exterior. Other new amenities added for the Bachman family were a kitchen and breakfast room at the rear on first floor, and a combined family room and guest bedroom above.

Like many of Goff's projects, the unorthodox character of the Bachman remodeling attracted much attention in the neighborhood and the city at large, and was featured in a full page photo-essay in the *Chicago Daily News* which was cryptically captioned "Have You Seen

This One?" Although no longer owned by the Bachman family, the house has been impeccably maintained in its original condition, and continues to be a local and international object of curiosity and interest.

## Have You Seen This One?

A HOUSE that needs little attention but gets plenty is what the Myron Bachmans have had since they remodeled their home at 1264 W. Carmen st.

When architect Bruce Goff glamorized the old frame building with corrugated aluminum and flared the second story, it wasn't just for effect.

This ribbed siding was used because it was inexpensive, required no painting and could be applied over the frame. The rising angles of the second floor conceal numerous eaves and attic windows.

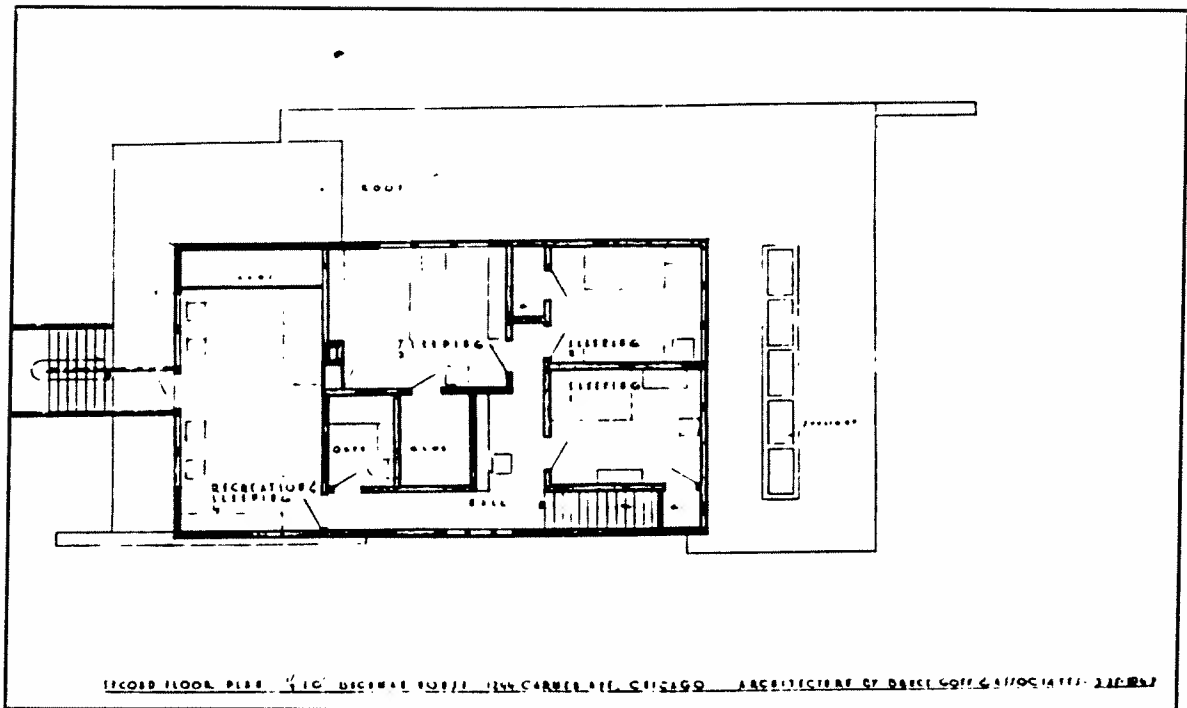
*George Pothier Photos*

THE width of the house was extended to foot so provide for a garage and this living room alcove. Unusual features are the skylight between the living room and alcove ceilings and the huge triangular window.

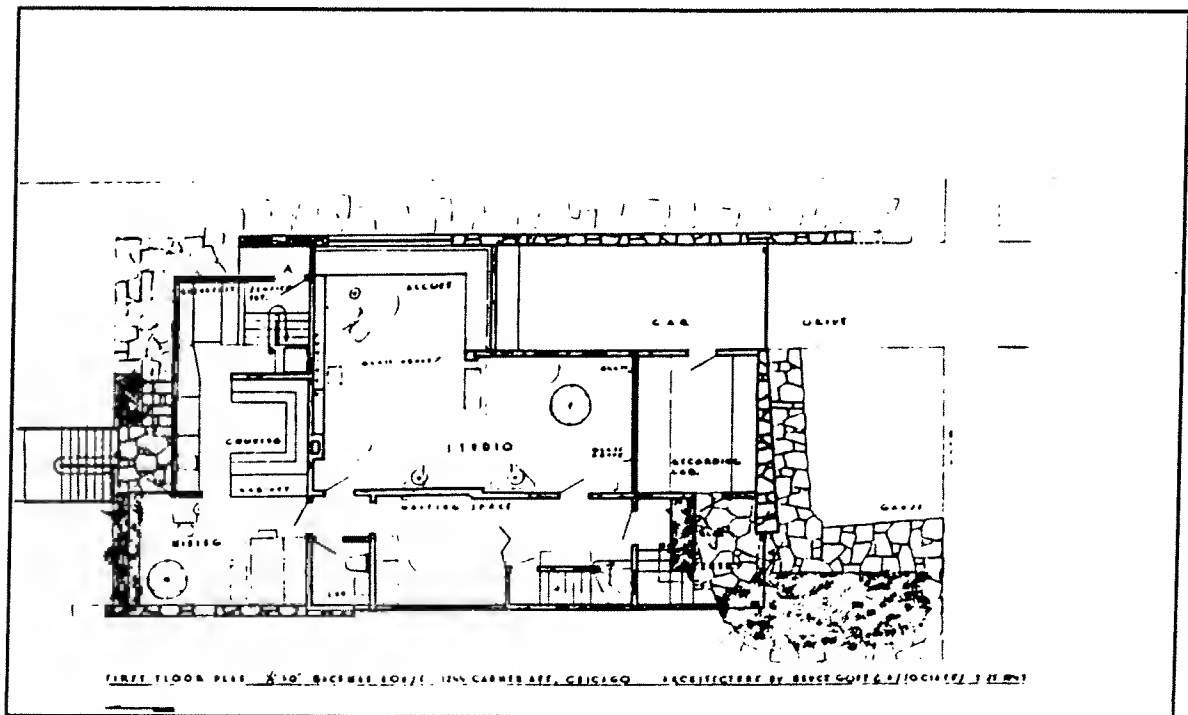
THE dining room presents few cleaning problems with its walls of brick and corrugated aluminum.

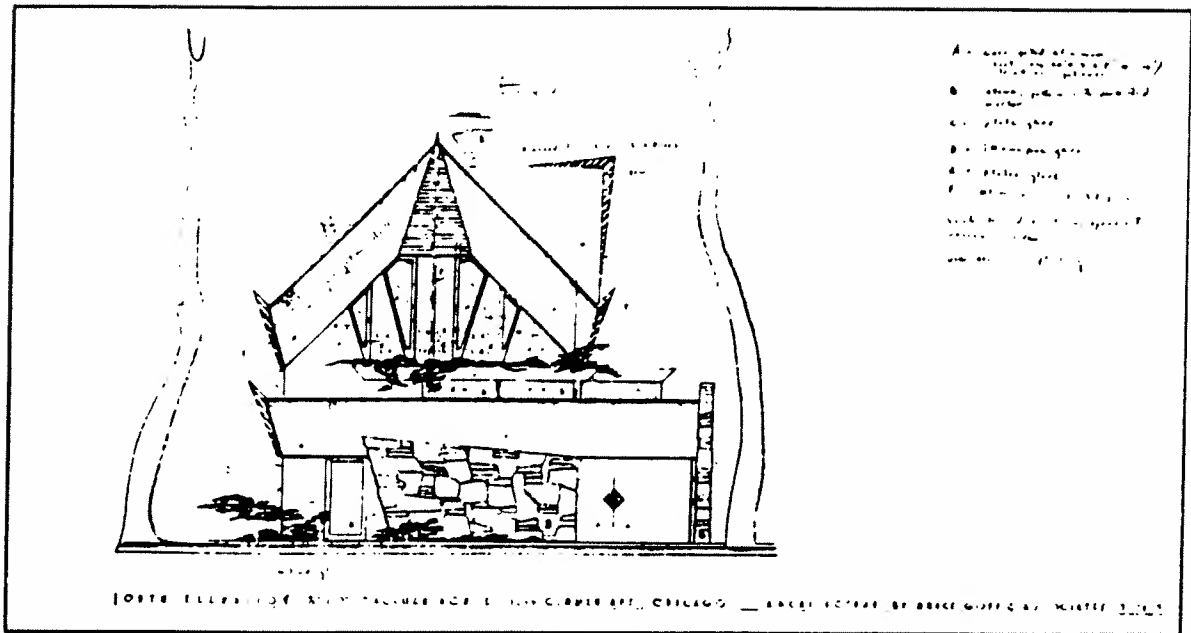
SOMETHING the architect didn't figure out but the Bachmans' son did — a matching aluminum house for Queenie.

THE old back entrance became a breakfast nook in the remodeling process. A solid wall of windows extends across the back of the house.

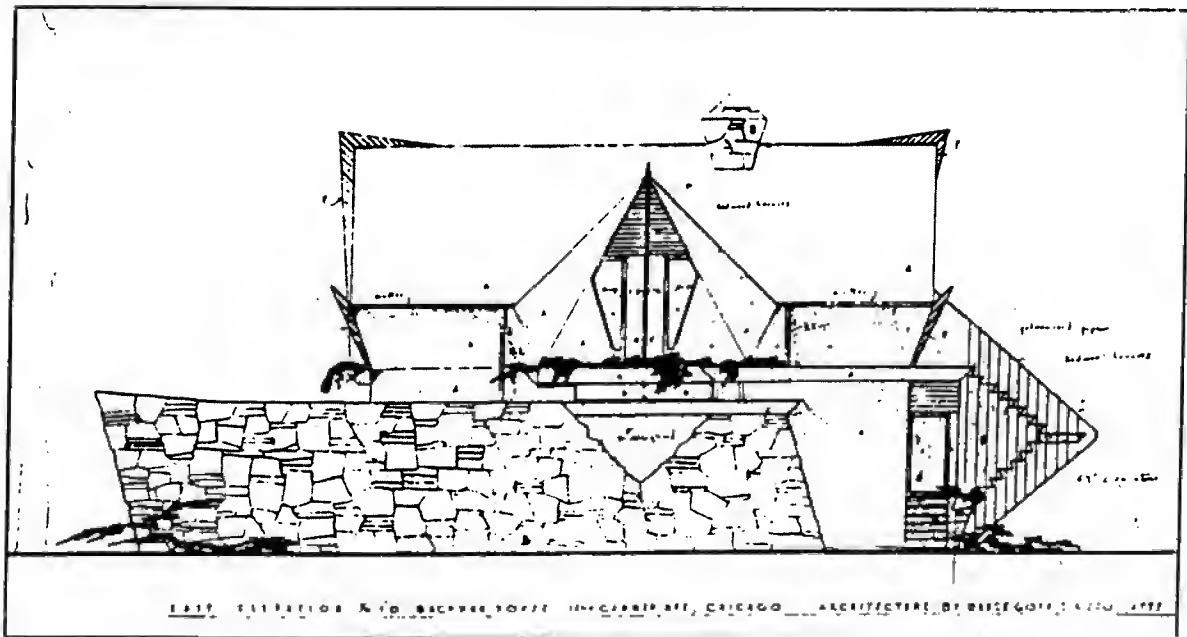


**Above:** In the Goff remodeling, the original first floor of the Bachman House was extended to the south and east with a brick addition. **Below:** The remodeled interior plan of the second floor was largely unchanged. (Courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago)





Drawings for the Bachman House remodeling indicate that the masonry walls were originally to be of yellow stone with black mortar joints, but were changed to common brick prior to construction. The second floor windows were also modified in execution. (Courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago)



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Bruce Goff Collection--The Art Institute of Chicago.

Additional material used in the preparation of this report is on file at the office of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks and is available to the public.

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*Staff for this Publication*

Timothy Samuelson, *research and writing*

